

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Edward Hall

USS NORTH CAROLINA

April 7, 1991

[What we would like for you to do, Mr. Hall, is to reminisce with us just a bit about your World War II experiences and your service aboard the NORTH CAROLINA and then any comments you may have on your other ships would also be of interest to me personally. Where were you from originally?]

I am originally from Boston, before I entered the service.

[Tell me about your background.]

I was in the CC's in 1937, 38 and 39. I joined the Navy in 1940, but they wouldn't take me until I got out of CC's. I got out before Christmas in 1940 and they called me in the Navy two weeks later. Then I went to Newport for three months training and from there we came to Brooklyn to get the NORTH CAROLINA. We did our receiving, our mess duty on the SEATTLE in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. We were still assigned to the NORTH CAROLINA. We couldn't eat aboard so we had to eat aboard the SEATTLE.

[What were you assigned to do initially?]

When I first came aboard the NORTH CAROLINA, I came on the deck quarters. I was in the Fifth Division. That was the division ____ ____. I took the test for coxswain, and I

made a good grade, but they didn't give it to me, so I went up on the bridge. I stayed up on the signal bridge all the while I was on.

[While the ship was still there in the Navy Yard being outfitted and everything, what kind of duties did you do?]

I worked on the deck force, cleaning and painting and scrapping the keel. Our division had the duty to scrap the keel and paint it with undress blues. No dungarees.

[This was before the war actually started.]

Yes. After that they passed it so you could wear dungarees. I had ruined three pairs of undress blues. Then I got out of deck force, and I went back up on the bridge and I stayed up there. We just stood communication watches.

[Were you part of the bridge crew through the entire period that you were on the NORTH CAROLINA?]

Yes. I was a side boy when I was on the deck force. I was a side boy for the ambassador from England. I forget what his name was now. I stayed on the bridge with the signalman. All through the North Atlantic shakedown in Jamaica and then we went to the coast. Then I got transferred back to Philadelphia and I got the COLUMBIA. I went out to Guadalcanal with the COLUMBIA. I stayed out there for three years.

[Did you leave the NORTH CAROLINA before it went to the South Pacific?]

I had taken off to the West Coast and when I left, it went south. I didn't see no action on it. In the North Atlantic, you know.

[During the shakedown and trials.]

That is when we lost the admiral over the side up there.

[Tell me about that.]

I can only tell from hearsay. I know he was walking on deck, and he missed the lifeline, and he went over the side. They lit the North Atlantic up like it was Times Square.

[Which admiral was this?]

I forget what his name was.

[Was this when Hustvedt was captain? It would have had to have been because he was the one who put it in commission.]

Yes, because we had three: Badger, Kirkpatrick, and Hustvedt. He was the last one that I was aboard with. Then we came back in. It was a real rough trip up there with that thing. That whole bow was under water. They lit up the whole sky with thirty-six-inch searchlights. They couldn't find him. It was too rough. As far as I know, they just stopped searching and looked. There was nothing they could do about it. He was on the WASHINGTON. That was the flag ship. I really enjoyed the duty on the NORTH CAROLINA. We had a bunch of nice guys.

[Describe a little bit about your daily routine.]

We stood out for our watches and when we weren't standing our watches, we would have classes. ____ classes. That would take the rest of the day. At night, we stood our regular four-hour watches and we had four eight-hours.

[As you mentioned, they weather there in the North Atlantic when you were on that duty was pretty rough, was it not?]

It was rough up there. That is when they had all the German subs up there. To light up the sky like that, we were really worried. Like everybody said, if it had been an enlisted man, they would have forgot about it. Seeing as he was an admiral, they had to go through formalities, I guess.

[Exactly.]

We would have classes with quarter masters. We would do quarter master work and then the quarter master would do work with us. We worked together.

[The NORTH CAROLINA was, like any battleship of this size, was almost like a city unto itself, was it not?]

When I came aboard, we only had twelve or fifteen hundred guys. When I left it there were thirty-six hundred. They were sleeping in the mess halls.

[That was for the trip over to the South Pacific.]

Yes. We had some good times over in the Brooklyn Navy Yard with her though.

[Such as.]

We were anchored down from Sand Street. We used to take the long glass and look up Sand Street. The shipmates were coming down to signal them and we would get them with a breaker light and tell them to take it on stores.(?) He would walk in and grab a bundle and throw it on his shoulders and walk up and _____. Then we had a group across the bay in the harbor. The girls signaled us. We used to talk to them with the center floor stuff, you know. That was just practice for them. Then the war broke out and the FBI got a hold of them and then they came over to us.

[What do you mean, the FBI got a hold of them?]

They thought we were telling them secrets or something. We were just talking to them, making dates or something.

[You were just flirting?]

Yes, but then the war broke out and they cut it out. We had to cut it out.

[What did the FBI say when they came to talk to you?]

They just told one of the officers that we would have to stop. They could read it, whatever it was. They were watching us, and we were giving nothing away. We enjoyed.

[That is interesting that the FBI would be watching the signals coming off the ship.]

You could see the signals, because a lot of times you used to use the yard arm blinker, too. The whole harbor could read it.

[What did the captain have to say about that?]

We never heard anything.

[They never got any kind of reprimand or anything from it?]

No. Because it was practice for us and for the girls. They enjoyed it. Signal that group over there like girl scouts, you know.

[What was the nature of the duty when you went down to Jamaica. Was it just part of the routine?]

Yes. We were standing our watches and then we had liberty there for a couple of days. It would be the same as working at any other port. The thing of it is, we got to Annapolis one day. We were overseas for three months. We got to Annapolis, and I never had uses for any guy to jump ship. I could never see that. But I did. I got away with it. There was three of us and they stick me with a watch. I said, "No." I got caught and they restricted me. It wasn't that bad. We had a good time.

[On something like that, you just went out on the town that night and left your duty station?]

Yes. I almost missed the launch out of Annapolis. I had to get back onboard ship. They caught me when I came aboard. They took me in captains masters. They restricted me for ten days. In ten days they were back out at sea, so the restriction didn't fit. It didn't

do anything.

[I imagine there was quite a bit of that. Particularly when you were Stateside here, now if you had done it in the war zone.]

One time, we were anchored out at Coraguin (?) Bay and Walter Winchell came aboard. This is when we got the name "Showboat." We had all these movie stars and everybody coming aboard. Walter Winchell and that ambassador's name was Halifax or something.

[Lord Halifax?]

Lord Halifax, right. He had one arm--one hand. He was on board. That is where we used to anchor out to take our ammunition out there in Coraguin (?) Bay. Walter Winchell come aboard.

[He is the one that tagged it Showboat.]

I think he was the one that gave us "Showboat."

[And you said that when you went to the West Coast, you were reassigned. Where were you put at in California? Long Beach?]

No I went to Frisco and then he transferred me to Treasure Island.

[Had you asked for a transfer?]

No.

[They were just moving you to new construction.]

Well, the COLUMBIA wasn't in commission yet either. I put that into commission in 1942. Then I will have another fifty years going next year. I went out to Guadalcanal with that and stayed out there in Guadalcanal and Bougainville and all the slots. I stayed out there for three years or two years with them and then I got transferred back to Long

Beach, San Pedro. That is when I got the mine sweeper. Then I went out to the Philippines. We stayed out in Leyte.

[You were on three completely different types of ships. Compare.]

There is no comparison with a battleship--other than a carrier. The carrier and battleship are about the same. The cruiser was a little strict, too. It was better duty than the battleship.

[In what way?]

You have a little more freedom. There weren't so many guys on board. You knew mostly everybody. The only ones you knew on here were they guys you worked with. It's like a big city.

[The very fact that it was big, didn't you feel more secure on a larger ship than you would have. A cruiser, of course, is a good size also.]

On the COLUMBIA, I was worried quite a few times about those kamikazes and the mine sweeper. That was my biggest concern with it. I lost a couple of buddies of mine. They were signaling, too. They were on the HORNET and the WASP. They got creamed. I was watching those kamikazes.

[Were either one of these ships hit by kamikazes?]

No. We came close, but we never were. When I left to salute, they went up to Japan. They hit a mine there and lost one crew man. He got blown up with the mine. That is the only casualty.

[Any of the officers that you served with here on the NORTH CAROLINA make a particular impression on you. I know you were only on here for . . .]

I was just showing my wife his picture down there. The admiral that just passed

away was the engineer on our ship.

[Maxwell.]

Maxwell. I remember him. I remember he used to come under a fantail or up on the bridge when I was up there. He would talk to you just like a regular Joe. I really liked him. He was a good officer.

[I have heard others comment on Maxwell. One that I used to hear a lot about who is now deceased that I got to know very well is Admiral Joe Stryker. I don't know whether he was on when you were here or not.]

I couldn't tell you. I really don't know.

[He was very popular with the men also.]

Striker. I couldn't even tell you who the communications officer was. A few of my buddies, I have been watching for them. I remember one time, I had shore duty up in Portland, Maine after the war. The NC [NORTH CAROLINA] was coming into Portland Harbor. I got on the blinker, and I talked to one of the guys out a sea. My buddy was quarter master, so he got on the light, and we were talking. I told I would meet him on the beach. I went aboard out there and saw a few of the guys I was with. I just couldn't remember their names. If I see their pictures, I will remember them. Like this fiftieth anniversary. I wasn't going to come down, but my wife says, "No. We are going. This is once in a lifetime, we are going." I could never make the reunions. I was raising a family and everything.

[Really, from Pennsylvania it is not that far down.]

No. Not now. Talking about years ago when I was raising a family. I couldn't take off because I had five kids.

[How about with the COLUMBIA or the SALUTE, did they have reunions of their crew?]

The COLUMBIA, they had their division reunion in September in Louisville, Kentucky. The SALUTE, I don't know. They just lost contact with me. I have to write them a letter.

[You were on one of them longer than you were on the NORTH CAROLINA, were you not?]

Yes.

[When did you go from the COLUMBIA to the SALUTE?]

I was aboard the COLUMBIA from June of 1942 until 1944.

[So you spent a better part of the war on the COLUMBIA.]

Yes. Then I went out to the Philippines with the COLUMBIA not with the SALUTE.

[Any particular recollections that you have of incidence aboard the COLUMBIA or SALUTE that really stand out in your mind?]

Not aboard the COLUMBIA. I was the lifeguard aboard the COLUMBIA, too and I was a lifeguard aboard the SALUTE. I put up a radar beacon out in the Philippines one day. There was five of us. I was a second class signaling and I was also the lifeguard, so they wanted me to go. We went out to put up two fifty-gallon drums in Mindoro at two o'clock in the morning. When we let it go, the Japs started shooting at us. Then we were sweeping the mines and blowing them up. I hit one and a piece of shrapnel came through the bulkhead and just missed my knee. It would have taken my leg right off. I kept that for quite a while. I said, "No more mines!"

[That would not be very appealing duty, I don't think.]

No. I enjoyed the SALUTE though. We had good times on there.

[When you were on either one of the other ships out in the South Pacific, did you ever come across the NORTH CAROLINA?]

No. Never did. They were at Guadalcanal, but they were there before we got there. I was up on the bridge; I would have seen it. I would have known. They were in different sections, I guess. We were down around Bougainville and they may have been around the other side. I don't know. Well, I enjoyed the time that I had on there. I remember the day the war broke out. I had just got off watch at four o'clock. I changed my dress blues, I got showered and shaved. My buddy was going on. No. I got off at twelve and he got off at four. I was standing on the deck waiting for him and that is when the war broke out.

[That was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard?]

Yes. That is when the war broke out. We were all standing in line for inspection, and they passed the word that all leave was canceled. I said, "I could have been ashore. I had to wait for you."

[I imagine with the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor, it changed your perspective quite a bit didn't it?]

I would say so. When that happened, we were all gung hoe. We wanted to get out of the Brooklyn Navy yard.

[It became serious business.]

Yes. Like a lot of guys, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" They found out.

[Any other thoughts about the NORTH CAROLINA. I know that early in the war was before the ship had the opportunity to be under fire seriously. It was probably different

flavor to it entirely than after it got out into the war zone.]

When I left it, they didn't have all these guns on it yet. I remember they put the forty millimeters up on the bridge. They cut the cam off of something and they fired and both of them went off and killed this marine that was standing there.

[Did they have the king fish running at the time? The little king fish airplane.]

I don't think we had them on there then. I know they were running with us all during the shake down. But I don't think they were. I remember going into Panama. It was five o'clock in the morning. I had the watch. We had general quarters. This marine up on the top deck over the bridge was showing his rooks how to load a fifty-caliber machine gun and the guy was a sergeant. Five o'clock in the morning and we are going into Panama and he let the purse go. You should have seen everybody jump.

[There was no secrecy at all in going through the canal at that time. I know later on, I talked with people, when ships were being moved from the Pacific to the Atlantic or vice versa, they covered their number and everything before they entered the canal zone.]

I think our number was painted over too. I am pretty sure it was. I remember going through the canals. They passed the word to open all fire hoses to flush then out with the fresh water in the canal. I was up on the fo'c'sle and I had one of the hoses and the skipper was coming up. He had just changed his whites. He opened the hatch and I hit him with the hose. That was funny.

[At the time I bet you didn't think it was funny.]

I could have jumped over the side. He laughed about it. He said, "I should have known better than to go up through the top."

[Was the Badger?]

No. It was Hustvedt. He said, "I should have went up through the inside. I shouldn't have come out on deck." He was a good sport about it.

[He was an interesting gentleman. Is there anything else at all you can remember?]

When we were in Brooklyn Navy Yard, they took a crew of us over to the Juneau to put the Juneau in commission. That was the one that got blown up with the Sullivan brothers. We all said, "We hope we don't get on this thing." Boy, we didn't. But they needed a commission crew because they didn't have a crew for it. A buddy of mine that I went to school with, we came from the same hometown. We went to CC's together and everything. He got aboard there.

[Why at that time did you not want to get on the Juneau?]

That was an ammunition ship. That is all there was on there.

[Just the prospect of . . .]

You think this one has a load of guns. That was only a cruiser. That thing had more guns than we had. Other than the sixteen-inch. Everything on those decks was ammunition, powder and ammunition. I wouldn't want that.

We made the North Atlantic with the WASHINGTON and they came back to Portland with us. From what I heard they were going to send the WASHINGTON to the west coast. That was last I heard. In fact, I haven't seen it since.